RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, 13th December, 1994/ 22nd Agrahayana, 1916 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock, Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTION

Demand for Post Offices in Nagpur District

*81. SHRI SURINDER KUMAR SINGLA :†

DR. SHRIKANT RAMACHANDRA JICHKAR :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) how many Gram Panchayats in Nagpur District of Maharashtra have demanded post offices;

(b) how many post offices will be given to the various villages in Nagpur District during the current year;

(c) in what manner this huge demand is proposed to be met; and

(d) what steps are being taken so that all the villages get a post office ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM) : (a) Six Gram Panchayats in Nagpur district have demanded post offices.

(b) Six proposals are under examination.

(c) and (d) Government's objective is to progressively extend the postal network to villages which satisfy the norms prescribed for opening of post offiice, subject to availability of resources.

†The Question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Surinder Kumar Singla.

SHRI SURINDER KUMAR SINGLA : Sir, first of all, I must commend the hon. Minister for the communication revolution that is taking place in this country on a very large scale. The communication flow amongst the Indians is increasing very rapidly. We are unfortunate that the post office facility, as I gathered, in 60% villages or Gram Panchayats is just not available. So, one is urban communication flow and the rural communication flow is very limited. Sir, (a) part of my question is what the total percentage of Gram Panchayats in the entire country having post office facility is.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is about Nagpur. ....*(Interruptions)*....

SHRI SANGH PRIYA GAUTAM : Sir, it is only for Nagpur, that is why we did not raise our hands.

SHRI SURINDER KUMAR SINGLA : Sir, (b) part of my question is even in Nagpur there are six Gram Panchayats which are demanding post-offices. I want to know for how long this demand is pending and what is the total number of such Gram Panchayats even in Nagpur district which are not having post office facility at present

MR. CHAIRMAN : I think the Minister can answer about Nagpur. Anything beyond that is a bonus that he can give.

SHRI SUKH RAM : Sir, the postal network in our country is the biggest in the world, even bigger than that of China and it

s not possible to provide postal services to each and every Panchayat within the shortest possible time because of contraint of funds. So, at present, there are 48% Gram Panchayats which have been provided with the postal service. As far as Nagpur is concerned, we have provided three branch post offices last year. As I have said in the answer to the main question, six Gram Panchayats are being considered and it takes some time because they have to be examined by the field officers as to which are the proposals which fulfil the norms prescribed for opening of sub-post offices and EDBO's. Sir, these are subject to availability of funds. For this year we have allotted 150 Sub-Post Offices for the whole of the country and only 80 EDBO's for the whole of the country. Now this number is to be distributed throughout the country. You could imagine how many post offices and sub-post offices can be allotted for each parliamentary constituency in the country.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Second supplementary.

SHRI SURINDER KUMAR SINGLA: Thank you very much for the bonus you gave. I am increasingly interested to know, considering the postal facilities, the basic facilities, whether the Ministry can apply its mind to forego the requirement of even a visit by the Postal Secretariat Official to know whether there is a need or there is no need. Everybody needs actually. This is the first question. Really, to my mind, there is no need of a visit. Part (b) of the question is, whether the Government is applying its mind, like STD booths being given to the private people where resources are not brought from the Government, to the question of giveing post office to the private people to provide basic facilities in every Gram Panchayat or not.

SHRI SUKH RAM: Sir, I wish that every Gram Panchayat could be given postal services within a year or so provided our Hon. Finance Minister is liberal enough to give us sufficient funds for the purpose. But, I know his constraints also. I am aware of his problems also. It is not possible and if we continue with this speed, it may take more than 30 years, to provide postal services to each and every Garam Panchayat in this country. I am coming before this House with a *suo motu* policy statement under which Gram Panchayat, by associating the unemployed youth, would be provided telecom as well as postal services in this country.

श्री महेश्वर सिंह : सभापति महोदय, . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry, I will call you afterwards.

DR. SHRIKANT RAMACHANDRA JICHKAR : Sir, in Nagpur district, there are more than 1,000 Gram Panchayats. Whenever we move there in the district, Gram Panchayats give us memoranda demanding post office. Whenever a State Government Minister or a Union Minister moves, he also would receive requests from the Gram Panchayats and these are forwarded to the Ministry. However, the Department says that there are only six Gram Panchayats who have demanded a post office. So, I want to know what the procedure is by which the Gram Panchayat demand is registered with the Department about a reauest for a post office. This is Part (a) of the question. Part (b) is, what are the names of the six Gram Panchayats who have demanded the post office? Part (c) is, since when their demands are pending with the Ministry and the last—Part (d) is, what are the norms prescribed for giving post offices?

SHRI SUKH RAM: Sir, I appreciate the concern of the hon. Member that there is a pressure. . (laughter). .

श्री गुरदास दास गुप्त : आप जाने वाले हैं, यह आने वाले हैं। . . . (व्यवधान)

SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA: You should say, "the would-be Minister."

SHRI SUKH RAM: He may become a Minister tomorrow. There is a lot of pressure on the hon. Members of Parliament and I am also in the same situation. Now, this is a pressure from one Member of Parliament and there is a pressure of 800 Members of Parliament both in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. So, what is my fate, because the entire pressure is on me? I wish that this pressure should be decreased considerably.

Now, as far as the 6 Gram Panchayats of Nagpur are concerned they are Sawangi Dhwalamati Palgawani Gumati Agangaon and Kapsi. These proposals are under consideration because proposals are either initiated by the hon. Members of Parliament or we directly receive the same from the Gram Panchayats. These proposals are scrutinised by the Field Officers and those who fulfil the norms, subject to availability of the number of post offices, are allotted. We try to keep the balance in all parts of the country and particularly in the constituencies. There are certain norms about population. In the normal areas if should be 3000 and in the hilly areas it varies from 500 to 1000. The distance of 3 Km. from the existing post office is also taken into consideration. Then we take as to what the return from that post office is. In the urban areas it has to be self-supporting and in the rural areas, if the revenue or the income is 33.3 per cent, then the rest of the expenditure is borne by the Department. In the tribal areas or in the hilly areas if the income is 1.5 per cent then we open the EDBO's.

DR. SHRIKANT RAMACHANDRA JICHKAR: Will you please tell as to how the Government can get revenue before the post office is granted because one of the norms is that such and such should be the revenue?

THE CHAIRMAN: There is a way of assessing this.

श्री महेश्वर सिंह : सभापति महोदय, अभी अभी मंत्री महोदय ने पोस्ट आफिसेज खोलने के मापदण्ड के बारे में कहा। यह हमारा सौभाग्य है कि मंत्री महोदय स्वयं एक पहाड़ी प्रांत से आते हैं और उसका प्रतिनिधित्व करते हैं। मैं मंत्री महोदय से आपके माध्यम से यह जानना चाहता हूं कि क्या वह इस बात से अवगत हैं कि जिस प्रांत से वह स्वयं यहां प्रतिनिधित्व करते हैं वहां एक ग्राम पंचायत से दूसरी ग्राम पंचायत का हैडक्वार्टर कई कई जगह 9–10 मील दूर पर स्थित है, जहां संचार व्यवस्था प्रदान करना हर व्यक्ति को आपका कर्तव्य है। क्या सरकार का वर्तमान मापदण्ड है उसमें थोड़ी छूट देने की कृपा करेंगे ताकि ऐसे दूरगामी क्षेत्रों में संचार व्यवस्था की सुविधा प्रदान की जा सके? यदि हां तो कौन कौन सी छूट सरकार दे रही है? क्योंकि जैसा उन्होंने कहा तीन मापदण्ड रखे गये हैं—जनसंख्या का, आय का और दूरी का। इन तीनों चीजों में छूट देंगे पहाड़ी प्रांतों में ताकि यह सुविधा अधिक से अधिक लोगों को उपलब्ध हो सके?

श्री सुख राम : सभापति जी, मैंने बताया कि ट्राइबल और पहाड़ी प्रांत के लिए पापुलेशन की छूट है, डिसटेंस की छूट है, जो फील्ड आफिसर्स हैं वे अगर देखें कि काफी बड़ा फासला है, तीसरे आमदनी में मैंने पहले दी 15 परसेंट कर रखा है वह बहुत कम है। इस तरह से आबादी की छूट है, डिसटेंस की भी छूट है। इससे ज्यादा मैं नहीं समझता कि और क्या किया जाए। चाहता तो हूं कि सब जगह यह मिले। मगर प्लानिंग कमीशन से और फाइनेंस से जितना रुपया हम को मिलता है, उसके हिसाब से हम पोस्ट आफिस की यह जो सेवा है, पोस्टल सेवा, इसको करते हैं।

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Dineshbhai Trivedi—I think, nearest to Nagpur, you are the one Member to put a question.

SHRI DINESHBHAI TRIVEDI : Sir, I restrict my question to Nagpur by just saying that whatever is true far Nagpur is true for the rest of the country as far as this subject is concerned. Sir, one of the reasons the hon. Minister has mentioned is that there are resource crunches. Sir, there is a lot of pressure on the postal services in two areas, specially after the reform which, otherwise, is deforming the society . One area is that there are a lot of quiz programmes in television serials where they are specifically asking that you send your replies through postcards. And it has also entered the Guinness Book of Records in terms of the number of postcards sent of to one particular programme. There are so many such programmes. there is a lot of pressurs, and the postcard, you will appreciate, the that is being subsidised for the poor people for basic communication is not serving that purpose. The second area is that because of these reforms, there are a lot of people applying for share certificates which pressure the postal services cannot take up because you are not inducing new capital there. My question is : How are you going to tackle this problem so that the poor people who constitute the majority in this country are not affected as far as the basic communication is concerned ? The delay is beyond 15 days for even a postcard.

SHRI SUKH RAM : Sir, I appreciate the concern expressed by the hon. Member for the Department and for the poor people. And keeping in view this fact that we are depending only on Nasik for printing of postcards, stamps and other stationery of the post offices, now we have liberalised and, according to the norms prescribed by the IDB. now the private printing presses also have been recognised. We have now given printing work to the private printing presses also and they are to be in the four zones—north, east, west, and south—so that transport cost is also considerably reduced and timely printing of postcards and other material is also ensured. That is one part that we have done. and it is likely to reduce the cost of the postal articles. Secondly, we are aware that a lot of postcards are being used for commercial purpose. Sir, this is a service being rendered to the poor people of this country. Fifteen paise for a postcard is nothing today. But, deliberately we are not increasing the price and only on the postcard which is highly subsidised we are paying about Rs. 75 crores as subsidy on printing, distribution and sale of the postcards. Now we have referred this matter to the Law Ministry. If we receive the okay from there, then the coloured postcards will be issued to those who want to use them for commercial purpose, for the Zee-TV and others and it may not be possible for us to subsidise the cost to that extent which we are doing at present. It may be considerably reduced. Therefore, we are thinking about it. If we receive the approval of the Law Ministry, we are. definitely, going to increase it. Similarly, in respect of other postal articles also. we are thinking it, as to how we can reduce the subsidy because ours is the only country in the world. as far as my knowledge goes, where the postal services are highly subsidised. In most of the countries. it is a commercial activity.

SHRI DINESHBHAI TRIVEDI : It is only after you read it that you would know whether it is commercial or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Question No. 82, Shri Chimanbhai Mehta.

(*Interruptions*). In fact, we have gone outside the scope of the question. I have given enough time-more than twenty minutes. Shri Mehta, please.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

*82. SHRI CHIMANBHAI MEHTA:† SHRI G.G. SWELL :

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) what are the details of foreign exchange reserves accummulated till date including the break-up of the loans of foreign Institutions and NRI's accruals and foreign trade earnings ;

(b) what is the position of foreign exchange outgo and income during the current year ;

(c) what is the estimated Foreign Exchange earning and expenditure by the end of current year on the trade account ;

(d) whether it is permissible for foreign financial institutions to take back their investments in stocks and shares in dollar currency ; and

(e) whether FFIs are permitted to buy dollars from RBI by converting their earnings in rupee in stock exchange ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M.V. CHANDRASHEKARA MURTHY) : (a) to (e) a statement is laid on the Table of the House.

† The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Chimanbhai Mehta.

Statement

(a) India's Foreign Exchange Reserves as on 30.11.1994 comprising foreign Currency assets of the RBI, gold and SDRs are given below :

	(US $ Million)
(i) RBI's foreign currency assets	19496
(ii) Gold	4082
(iii) SDR's	2
TOTAL	23580

Foreign exchange reserves reflect the balance of payments position. The level of foreign exchange reserves at any point of time is the net result of the initial reserve level at the start of the year and a large number of transaction in the external sector comprising trade, invisibles and capital account transactions during the year whcih are difficult to segregate. Because of these flows, reserves are constantly changing. Hence, it is not possible to give the break-up of the contribution by any individual item towards the accummulation of reserves.

(b) The descriptive position oe foreign exchange outgo and incomt is given by the balance of paymens statistics compiled by the RBI. The statistics for the last three years are given in the attached statement (*See* below). Balance of payment data for the current year are yet to be finalised.

(c) Foreign Exchange earnings and expenditures are dependent on the performance of country's exports and its import requirements. These depend on a number of factors both national and international. It is, therefore, difficult to provide estimates for future mionths.

(d) and (e) Yes, Sir.